

I. THE ARTIST : Introduction

In 1964, a European Swiss designer and jewellery store owner of Estrella del Norte (a shop for the illustrious and wealthy whose main branch was in Paris) in the Philippines invited a young juvenile delinquent to design jewellery on the spot. In twenty minutes, the young man finished seven designs in full color. The European was astounded by the output, signed the young man in to work at his shop with the instruction to create anything he wanted and never to follow the trend.

This fateful meeting begun the career of one of Asia's most progressive and original sculptors, **Eduardo Castrillo**. One instant, he was a youth unsure of what to do with himself; the next, he was a celebrated sculptor. Castrillo never formally studied sculpture. His formal art schooling was limited to commercial advertising art. (When in later years he chose to further his studies after gaining recognition as a sculptor, he took up architectural subjects rather than art courses).

In 1966, Castrillo broke into the contemporary art scene in an exhibition that caused a stir as critics had difficulty categorizing the range of his works. That year also marked the beginning of the trail of collectors to his *atelier* and international opportunities. Five years later, at the age of twenty-nine he would be receive the city's highest art award The Araw ng Maynila Centennial Award, the Jaycees Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) Award, and the outstanding Makati Resident Award as well as the nation's top award, the Republic Cultural Heritage Award bestowed on artists of national prominence. Then too he was sent as the countries representative to the Paris Beinnale and following thereafter to the Venice Biennale. Castrillo was awed by seeing European refinement in traditional and modern art and was convinced that some of his techniques were not being used in Europe, particularly embossed copper and constructed and welded brass.

From his entry into art through the *metier* of the intricacies of jewellery design, Castrillo moved from strength to strength creating monuments, reliefs, gallery pieces, objects d'art and theatre sets. But always he would return to creating his jewellery, the roots and wellspring of his larger works in welded brass.

International Exposure

Foreign governments were quick in inviting the sculptor for cultural visits and lectures. It was exposure to India and other parts of Southeast Asia that Castrillo was infused with the cultural skeleton of an ancient Asian culture which became his foundation upon which to challenge the pervasive influences of western art. Other government like Germany, Australia, Japan and the United States likewise hosted the sculptor.

His *ouuvres* toured the world, in museum and gallery exhibitions in Los Angeles, Florida, Washington, New York and Guam in the United States, Spain, Milan and Rome in Italy, Tokyo in Japan, Hongkong, International Biennales in Paris and Venice; with institutional and private collectors in these countries including Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, Poland and the Southeast Asian member countries.

Castrillo was the subject of a number of international television documentaries and publications in Asia, Europe and the United States.

Strengthening the Roots

Despite major offers in the United States, Castrillo decided to go back to the Philippines feeling that what he had achieved didn't carry his country and his Asian region along.

Castrillo's vision is to celebrate the greatness of his race, as a reflection of the best that humanity can aspire to. He sees the artist's profession as that of someone whose mission is to "add to the glory of the age." His Asian nature and spirit opposed the commercial call and enticement of the west and the promise of fame and fortune, and much as his skills were internationally recognized and appreciated, he decided at a time when political turmoil existed in his country, at a time when the Filipinos were sinking themselves into oblivion as a once economically powerful Asian nation second only to Japan. A vocal voice against an oppressive Martial Law presidency, Castrillo reflected the social ills of the Marcos presidency, and for his radical statements, was jailed for a time then later placed under house arrest.

Castrillo felt he had to heed an inner calling to bring hope and awareness back to his people. And he did this by proliferating the country with monuments of heroes that reflected the spirit of valour and national pride. These monumental sculptures meant to last a far longer lifetime than his own would bring back important moral and cultural stories and lessons for the Filipino people, the Asians and the world.

CASTRILLO UNVEILED

Excerpts from the Prologue of *BREAKING OUT: AN EDUARDO CASTRILLO SCULPTURAL TOUR*, written by Alfredo Roces, published by Inyan Publishers, 1995

...This sculptor seem hell bent on foresting the Philippines, if not this entire planet, with welded brass sheet structures. It has become an obsession – this planting of brass icons all over the archipelago. Financial rewards does not appear to be the moving factor: in the economies of scale he can make more money doing smaller pieces, especially jewellery for far less effort and headache. For these public monuments, he does in fact, offer creative contribution and his labor free, provided that the community or local government assume the cost of materials and other logistics. His ideas for these public monuments only get bigger and bigger, to the point where he is now earnestly flogging complete plans and blueprint for a welded brass monument that could house a museum or chapel inside its base while its apex could serve as a beacon light for aircraft.

But there is more to Castrillo than these imposing public monuments. His more portable sculptures in oxidized brass or chrome decorate homes and offices. He is also the creator of hammerout bas-reliefs in brass and silver which have extracted praise from critics for their craftsmanship and social commentary. Sculptured doors, tables and chairs, garden sculptures that play with fountains of water and move with the wind, colored panes of stained glass or acrylic, commemorative medallions cast from dies, silver sports trophies and religious chalices – all these and more have emerged from his bony hands; Yet another facet of this versatile sculptor s his flair for ultra-chic silver jewellery. It was after all, as a jewellery designer for *La Estrella del Norte* that Castrillo began his meteoric rise as an artist. Some may say that his gigantic monuments are merely jewellery design writ large; or are his jewellery pieces the stuff of monuments compressed into the sculptor's list?

Whether as jewelsmith or monument maker, Castrillo has introduced new ideas and new technologies to the Philippine scene. Herculean physical and technological obstacles have not daunted him, not even the most awesome of all ogres in the country, the bandstand of government officials whose approval and cooperation must be gained to complete each and everyone of his public sculptures. It will probably be some time before the general public and the art establishment will be able to fully digest and assess the scope and scale of Castrillo's accomplishments of more than three decades. For the sheer number of monuments, for the total tonnage of metal put into all of these, for the geographic proliferation of these sculptured pieces, and for the staggering amount of pesos and centavos expended, Castrillo has to take the prize among all the Filipino artists of his time.

Castrillo has a long way to go to match the grandeur of Angkor, a city-kingdom created in one specific site. On the other hand, the diversity and distribution of Castrillo's metal structures, their geographical spread, may be seen as a plus viewed from a grander scheme, enough evidence to suggest that he is on his way to getting there. The sum total of Castrillo's accomplishment to date, dispersed as they are, does "boggle the mind." And his waking hours these days are given to

striving mightily towards founding a sculptural Camelot, to turn fantastic obsession into a brass-city. Indeed he may just perhaps “pull it off.”

Other than an artist, Castrillo has been active in the art scene in various capacities; for some years he shared his knowledge and experience with students as a faculty member of the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines and as an artist-in-residence of the Far Eastern University. For six years he held the presidency of the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP), and simultaneously served as representative for the Visual Arts of UNESCO’s National Commission on Culture in the country.

...Whether art critics and aestheticians like it or not, Castrillo has shaped our cultural landscape by arousing public awareness to public art, to significant monuments of a country’s history, and to the aesthetics of metal sculpture and its immediate surrounds.